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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the findings of the Junior High School Transition Study. Section 1 describes the data base used in all three phases of the study. Section 2, "Organization of Instruction," discusses the instructional organization in grades six and seven and the implications for successful student performance in junior high/middle school. In the third section, students' concerns and feelings about their school experience are described. This section contains the results of the Student Opinion Survey, and of the Concerns Questionnaire, a comparison of certain key results of each instrument, and implications for improving the transition process and teaching practices. "Students' Response to Junior High School," section 4, discusses findings regarding students' success in transition, changes in student participation, success of students in general, and implications for improving junior high/middle schools. Section 5, "Students' Conceptions of Teachers and Classroom Experience," includes teacher descriptions, profiles of teacher types, and implications for improving instruction. "Parents' Concerns," section 6, discusses concerns that were reported, criteria for successful transition, and implications. A summary, references, and 6 tables are also included. (JM)

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JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION STUDY

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Volume VII: Executive Summary

Beatrice A. Ward
John R. Morgandoller
William J. Tikunoff
Thomas S. Rounds
Alexis L. Mitman
Gerald J. Dadey

November 1982

Far West Laboratory for
Educational Research and Development
1855 Folsom Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

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Junior High School Transition Study

VOLUME VII:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Beatrice A. Ward
John R. Mergendoller
William J. Tikunoff
Thomas S. Rounds
Gerald J. Dadey
Alexis L. Mitman

November 15, 1982

Far West Laboratory for Educational Research & Development
1855 Folsom Street San Francisco, CA 94103

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INTRODUCTION

Lounsbury, Marani, and Compton (1980) estimated that on a given school day in 1977, five million seventh-graders attended school in America. Multiplying this number by the three or four grades typically placed in junior high/middle schools, one can surmise that some 15-20 million students currently are enrolled in these "in-between" schools. Because of the unique characteristics of the age group that is served, the historical reasons for establishing such schools, and the current trend toward provision of a middle school as opposed to a junior high school education program, the context in which these schools function differs markedly from that which surrounds elementary school or high school education.

The Education Research Services (1977) brief summarizing research on middle schools describes students ages 10-14 as "inbetweenagers," "early adolescents," and "transescents." Eichhorn (1980) uses the term "transescence" to refer to "the stage of development that begins prior to the onset of puberty and extends through the early stages of adolescence" (p. 59). He notes that, since puberty does not occur for all precisely at the same chronological age, "the transescent designation is based on many physical, social, emotional, and intellectual changes that occur throughout these developmental stages."

Lounsbury, et al. (1980) suggest that seventh-graders are representative of the sorts of youngsters one would find in a junior high or middle school. In portraying these students, they state:

> Describing "the" seventh-grader is an impossible task for seventh-graders come in many sizes and shapes, with a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds, interests, likes and dislikes, and hopes for the future. Their stages of maturation are so varied; some are childlike without any outward indication of the physical changes which will soon transform them into true adolescents. Others already possess mature physiques and are capable of producing children. Some are weathering the maturation process with ease, while others writhe and struggle like butterflies emerging from tattered cocoons . . . The seventh grader, therefore, is a true paradox. These youngsters are alike mainly in their unlikeness, with differences not only from one another but within themselves, often from one day to the next. (p. 4)

Consequently, middle and junior high schools serve students during an important and unsettled period in their lives. Providing appropriate learning programs for these students when each differs

markedly from the next with regard to his or her stage of development, is challenging -- to say the least. Developmental theory (e.g., see Eichhorn, 1980) suggests that they should benefit from the security of structure, but with enough elasticity to explore learning and socialization in a variety of ways. They should respond to friendliness and encouragement on the part of teachers, the principal, and other staff members. They should function best in a school in which the "aura of learning" permeates the entire school.

However, Eichhorn (1980) notes that "there is no universally accepted prototype for an educational program for the transition school" (p. 68). Further, based on a recent review of research regarding junior high/middle schools (see Ward, Mergendoller, & Mitman, 1982), it is apparent that there is little empirical data from which to draw conclusions about what teaching and learning are or should be like in these schools and what features of the instructional program facilitate students' successful performance at the junior high/middle school level. In fact, an accumulation of basic descriptions about teaching and learning in a variety of junior high/middle schools does not exist. Currently, only two studies (in addition to the Transition Study reported here) are available that give extensive information about what happens in junior high/middle school classes. These are the study of junior high schools conducted at the Research and Development Center at the University of Texas at Austin (see, for example, Evertson, Anderson, Anderson, & Brophy, 1980), which furnishes basic descriptive information about the normative instructional practices of junior high school English and mathematics teachers in a large urban school district, and the study conducted by the National Middle School Association (see Lounsbury, et al., 1980), which supplies descriptions of seventh-grade student life in middle schools.

Because of the limited research base regarding successful junior high/middle school teaching and learning, and the even more sparse data base regarding students' elementary-to-junior high/middle school transitions, the Junior High School Transition Study provides information that is of considerable importance to school board members, school administrators, and teachers who work with this age student as well as to educational researchers and teacher educators.

The Junior High School Transition Study was designed to serve three purposes. These are:

1. to provide information about teaching and learning in the junior high school with particular emphasis on the period of time when students initially enter the junior high school.

2. to make recommendations regarding educational practices that help students move successfully from elementary to secondary school.

3. to identify aspects of the junior high school instructional program that appear to warrant attention

in order to build as effective a program as possible for all students.

To achieve these ends, data were collected regarding organization of instruction at the elementary school and junior high school levels. Students' concerns and feelings about their elementary school and junior high school experiences were investigated. The ways in which students participated in various types of instructional settings and the success thereof were explored. Students' descriptions of the junior high school experience were obtained. Parents' views of the instructional program were considered.

This document provides a summary of the sample, the data base, and the findings of the Junior High School Transition Study.

SAMPLE

The Junior High School Transition Study was conducted in a small city on the outskirts of a large metropolitan area. The city has undergone rapid growth during the last two decades. While a large portion of the city's work force now commutes into the central metropolitan area, the numerous feed mills that remain remind the visitor that agriculture still plays a significant role in the city's economy.

The city and its immediately surrounding area includes 11 elementary school districts serving grades K-6 and one high school district serving grades 7-12. One of the elementary districts and the high school district operate under a joint (single) administration and board of education. The other elementary districts function independently. Students from all 11 elementary districts matriculate to the high school district for grades 7-12. The high school district comprises two comprehensive (grade 7-8) junior high schools, two comprehensive (grade 9-12) high schools, and a continuation high school. The transition study took place in one of the junior high schools (Waverley Junior High School) and its feeder elementary schools.

The transition study was divided into three phases. Phase I concentrated on sixth-grade classrooms. Phase II focused on students' entry to junior high school. Phase III included follow-up data collection with the seventh-grade students in the spring of their seventh-grade year (the first year in junior high school).

The six schools feeding into Waverley Junior High School were invited to participate in Phase I of the study. All agreed to collect information regarding students' concerns and feelings about school. However, two schools declined to participate in the classroom observation aspect of the study, because each contained only one sixth-grade classroom, and anonymity of the teacher could not be maintained, given the type of data collection and reporting to be done. Thus four schools, their sixth-grade teachers, and the students in these classes participated in Phase I.

Phase II of data collection began during August, before school opened in the fall, and continued until the middle of November. This aspect of the study was conducted in Waverley Junior High School.

The Phase II teacher sample was drawn from those teachers at Waverley who worked with seventh-grade students. A total of 21 teachers taught these students at least one period per day. Eleven of the 21 teachers participated in the study. These were the teachers who worked with seventh-graders most of each day. Of the 10 who did not take part, 4 taught seventh-graders during only one period of the day, 1 taught foreign language classes, and 3 taught physical education. No observations were conducted in physical education because of the difficulty of following students and hearing teacher-student interactions on the playing field.

The 11 participating teachers included 5 female and 6 male teachers. The female teachers taught reading, home economics, history, math, and English. The male teachers taught English, art, math, reading, and music. Their teaching experience ranged from 2 years to 39 years, with a majority having taught more than 6 years.

Since an individual can teach in a middle/junior high school in California with either an elementary or a secondary credential, it is interesting to note the credentials held by the sample teachers. Only one of the sample teachers was trained as an elementary teacher and held an elementary credential. All others had secondary education training and credentials.

Almost all students enrolled in Waverley's seventh grade participated in some aspects of the transition study. (During the year of the study, this was approximately 375 students.) In addition, in-depth information was obtained regarding the transition experiences of 24 target students. The target students were selected so that:

- They could be observed in classes taught by the seventh-grade teachers participating in the study. Every effort was made to include a math and English class for each target student. Additional classes were included as observation scheduling permitted.

- An equal number of boys and girls participated.

- Across the sample, students who had been rated by their sixth-grade teachers as exhibiting a variety of classroom participation styles would be represented (e.g., success students, social students, dependent students, phantom students, and alienated students).

- Students from each of the four schools that participated in Phase I sixth-grade classroom observations were represented. Because of the restraints and complexities noted above, it was not possible to give each school equal representation. The number

of students from each elementary school were CH Dana, 5; Bluff Street, 5; Hawthorne, 6; and JM Keynes, 8.

Parents of the target students served as the sample for collection of data regarding parents' views of the instructional program. The same target students and all seventh-grade students at Waverley were involved in Phase III of the study.

DATA BASE

The data base for the transition study included the following information.

Phase I

During the spring of the student sample's sixth-grade year, the transition study began. The data sets for this phase included classroom observations and teacher interviews, teacher ratings of students' participation styles, and administration of the Student Opinion Survey by the cooperating school districts.

Thirteen sixth-grade classes participated in all aspects of Phase I. Each was observed for one full school day. The observations focused on the activity structures that the teacher had in place on the day of observation and the nature of the interaction between teacher and students within each structure. In addition, at the end of the observation day, an "informal observation" narrative was prepared, reporting on the teacher-student and student-student interactions that were observed, the discipline structure of the class, and other aspects of the classroom that the observer felt were significant.

In May, the 13 teachers also were interviewed by members of the transition study's professional staff. These interviews elicited descriptions of the teachers' instructional procedures. The interviewer probed carefully to obtain a complete picture for each subject taught by the teacher. Each interview lasted from two to three hours.

At the end of the teacher interview, each teacher was asked to make a list of the students in his or her class and, for each student, to indicate whether that student's participation in the sixth-grade classroom(s) could be described best as success, social, phantom, dependent, isolate, or alienate participation. A listing of characteristics that described the various forms of participation was given to the teacher to use as a guide in making these judgments.

Finally, in Phase I, the Student Opinion Survey was administered by the cooperating school districts to students in all the sixth-grade classes in the Waverley attendance area. The Survey (developed by

Power and Cotterell, 1979) measures attitudes toward school by having students respond to different statements about school and by having them rate different aspects of school (e.g., how difficult work is in various subject areas, positiveness of peer interactions).

Phase II

Data collection in the junior high school began as school opened in September. As noted above, the sample included teachers, students, and parents. Formal and informal classroom observations, student interviews, and parent interviews were conducted. In addition, all seventh-grade students completed a concerns questionnaire, and teacher narrative reports were obtained.

Beginning on the first day of junior high school, observers were present in the classrooms of the participating teachers. The observers directed their attention to the target students' participation in the lesson, interaction with the teacher, academic interaction with peers, nonacademic interaction with peers, and behavior during seatwork. The observers were also instructed to make careful note of the activity structure in operation, teacher evaluations of academic and nonacademic behavior, and the teacher's management of the classroom. For the first five days of observation, the observers completed the same activity structure coding sheet used in Phase I of the study. After these five days, additional codings were completed whenever a different structure was observed in a particular class.

After the classroom observations were completed each day, the observers prepared and dictated narrative descriptions for each class period that was observed. At regular intervals during this phase of the study, they also prepared informal comments regarding the teachers' and the students' behavior as it was developing over time.

Most of the narrative descriptions focused on the target students. However, on occasion, and particularly on the first two days of school, the observers focused their attention on the teachers, recording the teachers' explanations of the rules and procedures to be followed in the classroom.

Observations were conducted every day during the first week of school and on four of the five days of the second week of school. During the remainder of September and the first few days of October, observations occurred twice a week in each class. (The term "class" is used here to define one period of the school day; a teacher might have observations conducted in four or five periods, or classes, per day.)

In November, during the week report cards for the first quarter of the school year were distributed, classes were observed on four days (the fifth day was Veterans' Day, a holiday). As the block classes -- music, home economics, and art -- had finished at the end of the first quarter, students were not observed in their block classes in November.

Target students were interviewed twice during Phase II. The first interviews took place in October and lasted about 30 minutes. The second interviews took place in November, during the last week of data collection, and lasted about 40 minutes.

Both interviews were open-ended. They began with inquiries about "how seventh grade is going" and proceeded to examine the differences, as the students perceived them, between sixth and seventh grade. The next main area of discussion concerned the students' experiences in their classes. The students were asked to talk about their math and English classes, in particular, although if they spontaneously talked about other classes, they were encouraged to do so.

The parents of the target students were interviewed in August, before seventh grade began, and in November, after the students' grades had been distributed for the first quarter of seventh grade. These interviews also were open-ended. They sought information regarding parents' views of their children's move to junior high school. Thirty-four parents were interviewed in August; 32 in November.

In order to obtain information regarding students' concerns about the transition to junior high, during the fifth week of school, the cooperating school district administered a concerns questionnaire to all the seventh-grade students at Waverley. The questionnaire presented the students with a potential list of concerns about the move to junior high school and asked the students to indicate the degree to which they were concerned about each item.

In addition to all the data listed above, twice during the Phase II data collection period, the researchers asked the participating teachers to prepare narrative reports. In late September, the participating teachers were asked to discuss their plans for the year in the class or classes in which they were being observed. The intention was to allow the teachers as much freedom as possible in describing their instructional goals. They were asked to discuss how they organized their instruction and what they hoped their students would achieve. Also, the teachers were asked to comment on the progress of their classes to date.

In November, the teachers were invited to an all-day meeting with the Far West researchers. This meeting focused on the generation of two data sets. First, the teachers were asked to comment on the progress of all the target students who were enrolled in any of their classes. These comments included, but were not restricted to, the students' academic progress, their interactions with the teacher and other students, and any anecdotal information about the students' behavior. Second, the teachers were asked to assess the nature of the students' transitions.

Phase III

Phase III data were collected in May of the seventh-grade year. They included re-administration of the Student Opinion Survey by the school district and open-ended interviews by the study staff with target students.

ORGANIZATION OF INSTRUCTION

In the Junior High School Transition Study, areas of interest regarding students' transition from elementary to junior high/ middle school were: (1) the extent to which the organization of instruction changed from one setting to the other, and (2) if changes occurred, what the implications of these changes were for successful performance by students at the junior high/middle school level. The findings regarding this aspect of the study are summarized below. Findings from other data bases follow later.

Organization of Instruction (Grade Six)

Two school-level patterns of organization were found in the four elementary schools in which sixth-grade data were collected. Two schools utilized a "cluster" approach for assignment of students for instruction. In these settings, students rotated among three or four teachers for instruction in various subjects. The other two schools assigned the sixth-grade students to self-contained classrooms. In addition, one sixth-grade classroom in one "cluster" school was self-contained.

At the classroom level, six dimensions of instruction were investigated. These were: (1) the content of instruction, (2) group size and composition, (3) division of labor, (4) student control, (5) evaluation, and (6) student advancement. Together, these six dimensions formed the activity structure of the classroom.

The classroom observations and teacher interview findings indicate that all sixth-grade activity structures may be described as complex and diverse. Across a given day in the sixth-grade classrooms, regardless of whether assigned to a cluster or self-contained arrangement, a sixth-grade student was required to understand and function successfully (a) in several different grouping arrangements; (b) with a variety of responsibilities for control of work completion; and, in some instances, (c) in collaborative group project endeavors. Interestingly, the greater diversity occurred in the self-contained classrooms. While the sixth-grade cluster arrangements provided students an opportunity to become accustomed to interacting with several different teachers during the school day, most of the self-contained classrooms provided greater challenges in terms of structural diversity.

Hence the success of students' transition to junior high school can be viewed from at least two elementary school dimensions; multiple teachers and multiple structures. Within the structural dimension, variations in student control options appear to constitute a particularly important aspect of the elementary experience.

Organization of Instruction (Grade Seven)

Data that were obtained regarding organization of instruction at the seventh-grade level indicate that the architectural arrangement of Waverley Junior High School presented several mobility and student interaction problems to the entering seventh-graders. However, the activity structures in the seventh-grade classrooms were neither varied nor complex. For example, a student might go for several days experiencing only whole-group instruction. There was little division of labor observed in any class. For the most part, student control was restricted to control over pacing, a necessary result of assignments that lasted longer than one day. Student control over the content of an assigned activity was evident only in two classes, and, in these classes, the items over which students had control -- the number of vocabulary words and whether or not to do extra credit -- seemed uncomplicated. Only two teachers granted the students any substantial control over their academic experience. They allowed them to choose the amount of work they would do, which, in turn, was linked to the grade they would earn for a particular unit or assignment. Student advancement to new content always was dependent on the teacher deciding that the whole or small group was ready to move on.

Further, the content of instruction in seventh grade, for the most part, emphasized fact-recall and fill-in-the-blank exercises. Only the high-ability reading groups in the English classes were required to complete more complex learning tasks. Even in those classes where the teachers established varying performance criteria in order for students to earn higher grades, the higher grade requirements generally required the students to do more of the same type of lower cognitive activities rather than different, more complex ones.

The content of the mathematics curriculum raised other issues. At least through November of the seventh-grade year, the curriculum repeated computation skills and mathematical concepts that had been taught in fifth and sixth grade. As a result, a majority of the students in the math classes completed assignments quickly, with little attention to what was to be done. They reported that math was "too easy" and "boring" and questioned the need to repeat things they already knew. It must be emphasized that this finding is not unique to Waverley. The University of Texas and National Middle School Association studies mentioned earlier include similar findings. In any event, the math curriculum overlap appears to warrant attention.

One other area of concern was the omission of science as a subject that was offered to seventh-grade students.

Based on the findings, on the whole, it appears that a student from one of the elementary schools in the Waverley attendance area most likely had to respond to, and function appropriately in, more complex structures in his or her sixth-grade classes than in his or her seventh-grade classes.

However, although the seventh-grade findings underlined the similarity of the activity structures across the classes observed at the junior high school level, teacher behavior within the structures seemed to create different learning environments and different learning experiences for the students. Four features differentiated among the classes. These were:

- The extent to which the teacher was accessible to the students to help them with assigned tasks and provide feedback and reinforcement.
- The clarity of the teacher's directions and explanations, including the extent to which the teacher specified the requirements and characteristics of high quality vs. adequate student performance.
- The extent to which the teacher stressed only content coverage or also attended to students' interest in the assigned tasks.
- The degree to which the teacher established and maintained classroom rules and norms and focused disciplinary actions on the individual(s) who did not conform to these expectations, rather than using large-group sanctions.

Table 1 reports the presence or absence of these features in the classrooms of the 11 seventh-grade teachers who were observed.

As will be discussed later, depending upon the presence or absence of these features, some target students were observed to behave differently in one seventh-grade class compared with another.

Implications for Successful Student Performance in Junior High/Middle School

As part of the data analysis and reporting relative to students' transition experiences, a judgment was made as to the success of each target student's transition in each seventh-grade classroom in which he or she was observed. Four criteria were applied by two independent raters to derive a successful/unsuccessful transition rating. The first criterion was the grade conferred on a student by the teacher at the time of the first-quarter report card (end of first nine weeks of the school year), with a "C-" or better as the minimum grade required for a moderately successful rating. The second criterion was the student's academic behavior in the classroom, including amount

Table 1

Presence of Instructional Features That Differentiated Among Students' Learning Experiences in Seventh-Grade Classes

Seventh-Grade Teacher and Subject(s) Taught	Within-Activity-Structure Features			
	Teacher Accessibility	Establishment and Enforcement of Rules and Norms	Concerned With Students' Interest	Clear Explanations and Directions
AA (English)	Yes	Yes, flexible	Yes	Yes
AB (English and History)	Yes	Yes, rigid	Somewhat	No
AC (English)	Not mentioned	Yes, flexible	Yes	Not mentioned
AD (Math)	No	No	No	No
AE (Math)	Yes	Not clear	Yes	Not mentioned
AF (Art)	Yes	Yes, flexible	Yes	Not mentioned
AG (History and Music)	Yes	Yes, rigid	Not mentioned	Yes
AH (Reading)	No	Yes, flexible	No	Yes
AI (Reading)	No	Yes, rigid	No	Not mentioned
AJ (History and Math)	Yes	Yes, rigid	Yes	Not mentioned
AK (Home Economics)	Not mentioned	Yes, flexible	Yes	Not mentioned

of time engaged in academic vs. nonacademic work, correctness of oral responses to teacher questions during recitation or lack of such responses, and completion of assigned work. The third criterion included a general assessment of the appropriateness of the student's classroom behavior, given the rules and norms operable in the classroom. The fourth criterion looked at the student's social relationships with his or her peers, at a minimum requiring the relationships to be nonhostile. Using these criteria, each rater assigned each of the 24 target students an over-all successful, moderately successful, or unsuccessful transition rating for each classroom in which the student was observed. The ratings then were compared. In those few instances where the raters disagreed, a third party was asked to read the student's case description and make a rating. The majority rating prevailed.

Implications For Sixth-Grade Programs

Students' general transition ratings were related to two features of the sixth-grade. These were (1) whether the students worked with several teachers or were in self-contained classrooms in sixth grade and (2) the diversity in activity structures that the students experienced across a given sixth-grade school day.

Relative to working with multiple teachers, as reported in Table 2, the students from the self-contained classes appear to have been more successful in their transitions to Waverley Junior High School than those who worked with multiple teachers. All the students who were from self-contained sixth-grade classes made successful or moderately successful transitions, while approximately 25 percent of the students from the sixth-grade settings where students moved from teacher to teacher failed to make successful transitions by the end of the first quarter of the school year.

Table 2

Success of Target Student Transition to Seventh-Grade Based on Sixth-Grade Self-Contained or Diversified Classroom Setting

CLASSROOM SETTING	PERCENT TARGET STUDENTS' TRANSITION		
	Successful	Moderately Successful	Unsuccessful
Self-Contained	.66*	.33	.00
Diversified	.42	.33	.25

*Percent rounded to nearest hundredth.

The extent to which students were required to adapt to, and perform successfully in, different types of activity structures across the subject areas in the sixth grade also was related to successfu transition. The data in Table 3 indicate that target students from the sixth-grade classes with diverse structures were more successful in their transition to junior high school than those from other classes. This diversity assumed several forms. For example, in terms of grouping, in some sixth-grade settings, students worked in small groups based on ability in one subject, carried out individualized assignments in another, and worked collaboratively with 4-5 students of differing ability in a third subject, and so on. These diversified structures were found in some self-contained classes and some combinations of "cluster" classes.

Table 3

Success of Target Student Transition to Seventh-Grade Based on Structural Diversity in Organization for Instruction Across Sixth-Grade Classrooms

ORGANIZATION OF INSTRUCTION	PERCENT TARGET STUDENTS' TRANSITION		
	Successful	Moderately Successful	Unsuccessful
Structural Diversity	.73*	.18	.09
Similar Structure	.42	.33	.25

*Percent rounded to nearest hundredth.

These data suggest that students who learned to adapt to different structures (rather than different teacher personalities) in sixth-grade were better prepared to perform successfully in the departmentalized, six-period, seventh-grade program that existed at Waverley than students whose sixth-grade teacher(s) used similar activity structures for all subject areas. This, in turn, suggests that development of students' skills in decoding, understanding, and responding to the demands placed upon them by different configurations of activity structure elements may be a more important elementary school experience than merely moving from one teacher to another. Even though the seventh-grade teachers employed similar activity structures, previous experience with diverse structures in elementary school seemed to enhance students' capacity to move into the junior high school program successfully. Building such experiences into the elementary school program, therefore, appears to be warranted.

Implications for Junior High/Middle School Programs

The transition study findings suggest several areas for improvement of the junior high/middle school program.

First, the content of the seventh-grade curriculum requires review. In particular, the overlap in the math curriculum (which is a nationwide issue) needs attention. In addition, the emphasis on fact-recall learning activities that was observed at Waverley should be examined. When conducting such a review, teachers and others are urged to keep in mind the dilemma posed by the work of Epstein and Toepfer (1978) -- which suggests that "transescent" students are in a period of brain growth during which completion of new, complex tasks should be kept to a minimum -- and the work of cognitive psychologists (e.g., Ausubel, 1980) -- which indicates that seventh-grade students are increasing in their ability to handle abstract levels of cognitive functioning and complex instructional tasks. Development of an instructional program that is challenging and expands the students' cognitive abilities, yet does not press for acquisition and use of a large number of new skills and processes in all subject areas at the same time, seems to be suggested. This most likely will require across-subject-area and across-grade-level review and planning.

Second, the complexity of the junior high/middle school education program also needs to be considered from another perspective. This is the lack of diversity in the activity structures used by the various teachers. Although research on secondary schools -- including high schools as well as junior high schools -- suggests that lecture or recitation followed by seatwork is a common instructional practice, this may not be desirable. As was found at Waverley, six or seven classes per day based on the same activity structure not only creates a boring situation for teachers and students alike, it fails to continue to build the students' skill in responding to a variety of work demands that was started at the elementary school level. In order to prepared students better for successful performance when they leave school and enter college or the work force, continued experience in more complex and demanding activity structures is suggested. This, in turn, may require modification in the scheduling of the school day, since a schedule that includes six or seven 50-minute periods may limit the types of structures that can be organized and used effectively for instruction.

Third, various ways of grouping students for instruction, both within and across classes, should be explored. The classes at Waverley in which students were assigned to small groups based on ability were the ones in which at least some students completed more complex instructional tasks (i.e., tasks that were above the fact-recall level). Consideration should be given to the use of such groups in all classes. Further, a possible resolution to the curricular overlap in math may be broadening of the math options offered to students and assignment of students to various math areas based on the skills and knowledge mastered in sixth grade. Waverley currently offers two such levels to seventh-grade students -- general math and math fundamentals. Provision of more advanced courses also should be considered.

Fourth, the teachers who had more than half the target students enrolled in their classes make successful transitions were those who were accessible to students and who established a system of rules and norms that maintained a classroom environment in which the teacher and students could function productively (see Table 4). Clarity of teacher instruction and attention to students' interests seemed to be less important. Attention to students' interests was found to be helpful in terms of maintaining students' attention to assigned tasks. Analysis of the extent to which these four instructional features are operable in junior high/middle school classrooms and conduct of school improvement programs that increase and perfect teachers' use of these features are suggested.

STUDENTS' CONCERNS AND FEELINGS ABOUT THEIR SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

When students make the transition from the elementary school to the junior high school, they experience many changes. They move to a new school site. Even if they come from an elementary school where they had more than one teacher during one grade level, they usually meet even greater diversity of teachers in junior high school. They are assigned to classes in which most of the students are from other schools and thus are people they don't know. Little is known about how students themselves perceive this transition experience. A better understanding of these perceptions is needed to understand what, if anything, makes the transition experience difficult or enjoyable. Student perceptions also are important because they serve to at least partially mediate the impact of the new school environment on student behavior. In other words, students' own definitions of the situation help determine the students' overt behavior in that situation.

As discussed earlier, a student opionion survey and a concerns questionnaire were used by the school district to inquire into students' perceptions of the transition experience. The analyses for each of these instruments were conducted separately. Descriptive statistics for both instruments were obtained. The item responses to each instrument also were factor-analyzed. Finally, variation in student responses to each instrument was tested for its relationship with the independent variables of sex, classroom participation style (as rated by their sixth-grade teachers), and previous approach to organization of instruction in sixth grade (self-contained or cluster).

Before moving on to a brief summary of results, it should be noted that the sample sizes for the analyses of the SOS and Concerns Questionnaire were different. Analyses for each instrument were based on those students who had complete data (i.e., answered all items and had data on all independent variables). Because the SOS and Concerns Questionnaire were administered at different times, the set of students with complete data on the two instruments did not overlap completely. A total of 143 students had complete data for the Student Opinion Suervey, including data for both the sixth- and seventh-grade administration of the survey. A total of 208 students had complete

Table 4

Percent of Target Students Who Were Rated Successful, Moderately Successful, or Unsuccessful in Specific Seventh-Grade Teachers' Classes

SEVENTH-GRADE TEACHER	TARGET STUDENT TRANSITION RATING		
	Successful	Moderately Successful	Unsuccessful
AA	.56*	.27	.18
AB	.56	.09	.36
AC	.66	.33	.00
AD	.45	.09	.45
AE	.62	.13	.25
AF	.50	.50	.00
AG	.60	.00	.40
AH	.50	.00	.50
AI	.50	.00	.50
AJ	.58	.00	.42
AK	1.00	.00	.00

* Percent of target students enrolled in teacher's classes rounded to nearest hundredth.

data on the Concerns Questionnaire (of whom 123 were in the SOS sample as well). Both samples were similar in terms of the percentage distribution of students among the sex, participation style, and classroom organization groups.

Results for the Student Opinion Survey

When students' responses to the SOS at the end of sixth grade were compared with their responses at the end of seventh grade, a general trend was found. This trend indicated that students were generally less satisfied with school at the end of seventh grade than they had been at the end of sixth grade. The only area where students indicated a more positive response to junior high school was academic performance. For example, the students reported they were less concerned about doing badly on exams and were less tense when asked questions during class discussion in seventh grade than in sixth grade. They rated seventh grade, in general, as being easier than sixth grade.

Factor analyses of the SOS yielded an interpretable factor structure. For the sixth-grade data, seven factors were identified: need for self-direction, confidence about academic performance, friendship, belongingness in school, poor progress with schoolwork, general dislike of school, and positive attributions about school. The seventh-grade data analysis yielded five similar factors: general dislike of school, confidence about academic performance, friendship, poor progress with schoolwork, and positive attributions about school. Three new factors also were identified: sense of purpose, positive teacher, and lack of control over work.

When scores for the various factors were analyzed to determine their relationship with the student characteristics of sex, participation style, and previous classroom organization, several trends were noted. For one, female students were more positive about more aspects of school than male students. The only areas in which males were more positive than females were in their confidence about academic performance and mathematics. Most effects for the participation style variables also followed a general pattern, so that students in groups defined as being more academically and socially oriented tended to express more positive attitudes than students in groups defined as being more withdrawn or disruptive. Thus, while the overall attitude of all students fell between sixth and seventh grades, the students who experienced the least negative decline were those who were involved in school in acceptable ways and probably were rewarded according to the academic and social systems in place at the school.

In contrast, the independent variable of cluster vs. self-contained sixth-grade classes was relatively unimportant. This suggests that a cluster versus no-cluster arrangement in sixth grade by itself had little direct impact on student satisfaction with school, both at the sixth-grade and seventh-grade levels.

The findings regarding changes in students' attitudes are consistent with those of other investigators who have used the same instrument at the junior high/middle school level (Evans & Richards, 1980; Power & Cotterell, 1979). The lack of a relationship between organization for instruction and students' attitudes is supported less by previous research. The literature is equivocal about the role of this organizational variable (cf., Evans & Richards, 1980; McPartland, Epstein, & McDill, 1972; Power & Cotterell, 1979).

Results for the Concerns Questionnaire

Descriptive statistics for both the "in the past" and "today" portions of the Concerns Questionnaire indicated that most junior high students did not have great concerns about the items listed. Nonetheless, it was possible to distinguish between items in terms of the relative degree of expressed concern.

In general, students expressed relatively more concern about those items having to do with academic work and relatively less concern about those items having to do with the social aspects of junior high school, a finding that is somewhat counter to theoretical beliefs regarding the transition process. Within the general lack of concern that was found, the areas about which the students expressed most concern, both at the beginning of seventh grade and five weeks into the year, were (1) having to do too much homework, (2) getting to class on time, (3) being given difficult schoolwork, and (4) being able to get work done on time. At the beginning, they were least concerned about going into the restroom, having their parents and teachers communicate with one another, and having easy classes. Five weeks later, they were least concerned about finding the rooms of different teachers, going into the restroom, and undressing for gym.

Further, when students were each given a total concerns score, results showed a significant decrease in total expressed concerns from the "in the past" to "today" portions of the questionnaire. This suggests that students viewed themselves as having adjusted to whatever few transition problems existed within the first few weeks of junior high school. The independent variables of sex, participation style, and previous cluster or self-contained organization did not serve to explain significant amounts of variance in the total concerns score.

When the Concerns Questionnaire was factor-analyzed, an interpretable and overlapping factor structure was identified for both the "in the past" and "today" portions of the questionnaire. For the "in the past" data, five interpretable factors were extracted: difficulty of schoolwork, negative peer relations, privacy, classes, and less control. The "today" factors were difficulty of schoolwork, less control, negative peer relations, newness of junior high school, privacy, and friends.

As with the SOS analyses, the next step was to determine whether the independent variables of student sex, participation style, and previous cluster or self-contained organization accounted for significant portions of variance in the different sets of factor scores. The results showed that all three variables played a role in accounting for variance on some factors, but there were no notable consistencies in the patterns of means for the significant group comparisons.

Comparison of Certain Key Results from Both Instruments

The results of the two student perception instruments used in this study are worth comparing. In particular, as a whole, the SOS results indicate that, compared with elementary school, students were dissatisfied with junior high school in many ways. In contrast, the Concerns Questionnaire results suggest that there was little that students perceived to be a problem in junior high school. Furthermore, whereas the SOS results show that academic performance was the one area where students felt more positive in junior high school, academic work was the area that received the highest relative concerns ratings on the Concerns Questionnaire.

Perhaps the most plausible explanation for the above discrepancies in the SOS and Concerns Questionnaire results has to do with the different times at which the two instruments were administered. While SOS results concerning students' attitudes toward junior high school came from an administration that took place within the last month of seventh grade, the Concerns Questionnaire was administered at the very beginning of the year, during the fifth week of seventh grade. In other words, students may have been more favorably inclined to the junior high school experience at the beginning of the year than they were at the end of the year. Two studies that administered the SOS both at the beginning and end of the first year of secondary school lend support to this claim. Both Evans and Richards (1980) and Power and Cotterell (1979) report that students' attitudes were more favorable at the beginning of the first year of secondary school experience than at the end. The latter authors specifically suggest that the early period of the first year in secondary school may be "the most satisfying period" in the transition timeframe. The reason for this positive peak in attitudes may be that students are generally enthusiastic about any change in environment -- e.g., a "novelty" effect. Hence, in the transition study reported here, the lack of expressed concern may have been due to the fact that the Concerns Questionnaire was administered at a time when students were feeling exceptionally positive about their new school.

Differences between the two instruments in responses to items about academic work also may be tied to temporal factors. For instance, at the beginning of the year, the nature of the academic work demands may have been difficult to interpret and understand. Further, students may have entered with the expectation that work in junior high school would be more difficult. By the end of the year,

however, students certainly had enough experience to make the judgment that the work was less difficult than they expected and probably had figured out the work demands.

Other factors may have contributed to differences between the results for the SOS and Concerns Questionnaire as well. For one, the SOS was an instrument with a broader focus than the Concerns Questionnaire. While the SOS asked students to indicate their attitudes toward their experience during the entire school year, the Concerns Questionnaire focused on the much briefer time period of transition. It is possible, for example, that students were dissatisified with Waverley at the time they completed the Concerns Questionnaire, but that this did not show up because they viewed the transition process itself as problem-free. Students, then, may have worked from very different frames of reference when completing the two instruments.

Implications for Improving the Transition Process and Teaching Practices

The findings regarding students' concerns and feelings about their elementary and junior high school experiences suggest two areas that require attention by those responsible for improving junior high/middle school education.

First, although the transition study data base included no information that would suggest the students were engaged in special transition-preparation activities, the ways students in the Waverley feeder elementary schools were prepared for the move to junior high school warrant further documentation. Perhaps the feeder elementary schools alone, or in collaboration with the junior high school, conducted introductory activities that acquainted the students with, and laid the foundation for, easy entrance into the schooling process at the junior high level. Likewise, Waverley may have provided some entry experiences that made the transition "no big deal." If so, activities of this sort could be described and recommended to other schools.

Second, based on the information reported earlier regarding the lack of complexity in, and the repetitiveness of, the seventh-grade curriculum, it is highly likely that moving to junior high was simply an easy process that raised few concerns on the part of the students. The desirability of this state of affairs needs to be determined.

Relative to the latter issue, as noted earlier Epstein and Toepfer (1978) suggest that review of previously mastered concepts and skills and completion of straightforward tasks may better suit the needs of junior high/middle school students than complex assignments that include new concepts and skills. Others (e.g., Ausubel, 1980) indicate that these students are moving to more abstract levels of cognitive functioning and thus are able to handle different, more complex types of instructional tasks. Determining whether and how to respond to

both the student-perception data and certain aspects of the instructional data presented thus far requires consideration of both sides of this yet-to-be-resolved development dilemma.

STUDENTS' RESPONSE TO JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Students' response to junior high school was investigated from two theoretical perspectives. The first perspective centered around the ways students participated in the person-to-person interactions and the learning tasks that were a regular part of classroom life. This perspective builds on the notion that student participation will differ across students and across classes and thus may be influenced by the type of instructional situation(s) in which students are placed. The second perspective builds from the first and hence takes a broader view of the criteria used to determine whether a student has made a successful transition to junior high/middle school. It centers around the tenet that, while academic achievement is an important aspect of a student's successful performance in junior high/middle school, other factors, such as peer relations and adaptation to classroom rules and norms, also are important.

In order to investigate differences in students' transition success, given different modes of student participation, teacher ratings of the ways the students participated in their sixth-grade classes were used as one of the selection criteria for the 24 target students who were studied in depth. Six participation categories were utilized (see Ward, Tikunoff, Lash, Rounds & Mergendoller, 1981). They are:

> Success/multitask. This student almost always is involved in some form of work, carrying out several tasks concurrently, performing well on all of them; answers teachers' questions when called upon, giving correct and complete answers, but seldom volunteers or calls out answers; seldom interrupts work to talk with other students; seldom needs help from the teacher, but initiates interaction when necessary.
>
> Social. This student mixes brief periods of concentration on assigned tasks with high involvement in conversations with others, only some of which are academic; voluntarily answers teachers' questions; often sanctioned by teacher for talking; initiates both social and academic interaction with the teacher.
>
> Dependent. This student is involved in learning when working in a small group, but is less attentive in total-class situations; needs frequent assistance, feedback, and other types of attention from the teacher and/or others to remain on-task; if this sort of response is not received, does not continue to engage in assigned learning activities.

Phantom. This student almost always attends to insructional activities, but with little, if any, active verbal or physical involvement; almost never initiates interaction with others; almost never volunteers to answer the teacher's questions.

Isolate. This student evidences sporadic engagement in assigned activities; frequently gazes around the room and plays with pencils and other objects, but does not disturb others; purposely separates self from the group; is not spoken to by other students; hesitates to have others see his or her work.

Alienate. This student often appears to be in confrontation with other students and the teacher; frequently disrupts the class; seldom attends to assigned tasks; seldom responds to the teacher's questions, even when called upon.

As noted earlier in the description of the sample, the 24 target students included 4 students who were rated success/multitask by their sixth-grade teachers, 4 rated as social, 4 as phantom, and 4 as alienate. Eight students who were given dependent ratings were included. No students with isolate ratings were in the target student group because few students were given this rating and parental permission was not obtained for them.

Also as discussed earlier, four criteria were applied by two independent raters to derive a successful/unsuccessful transition rating for each of the target students who was observed as (s)he entered Waverley. Using these criteria, each rater assigned each of 24 target students an over-all successful, moderately successful, or unsuccessful transition rating for each classroom in which the student was observed. The ratings then were compared. In those few instances where the raters disagreed, a third party was asked to read the student's case description and make a rating. The majority rating prevailed. The summary that follows presents data regarding the target students success in seventh-grade.

Findings Regarding Students' Success in Transition

As might be expected, target students who were rated as success/multitask students by their sixth-grade teachers, for the most part, were successful in their transition to junior high school, regardless of the classes to which they were assigned. Only one target student who received this sixth-grade rating performed unsuccessfully. In two of his classes, this student exhibited unsatisfactory academic behavior. He was judged to be only moderately successful in his transition in these classes.

Students rated as social participants in sixth grade also made generally successful transitions. Not surprisingly, adaptation to classroom rules and norms was the success criterion with which most

of these students had difficulty. For them, it was essential that the teacher establish and enforce, on an individual-student basis, a clear set of rules and procedures. When these were lacking, social students became disruptive and applied less of their time to academic tasks. Nonetheless, all of them received "C" grades or better, with the preponderance being "A's" and "B's."

Somewhat contrary to expectations, the phantom students in sixth grade also made successful transitions. Their quiet way of working seemed to work well in the activity structure observed in the majority of the Waverley seventh-grade classes. Being in a classroom with rigid rules that allowed little mobility or interaction with others seemed to result in better performance for these students than classes where the rules were based on more flexible standards, such as not infringing upon the rights of others or interrupting their work. All the phantom students were rated as making successful transitions, socially, as well as academically. One student seemed to have academic problems in some classes, but not others.

In general, students rated as alienates by their sixth-grade teachers were unsuccessful in their transition to junior high school. Academically, they were judged as not attending to assigned tasks or participating productively in the majority of their classes. They received the preponderance (all but one) of the "F" grades given to the target students. Their peer relations were poor and they had difficulty following classroom rules and norms. In other words, their confrontational behavior continued in the new setting.

Students who were rated as dependent students by their sixth-grade teachers had a mixed pattern of successful performance in seventh grade. The extent to which the teacher was accessible to provide help and feedback appeared to be particularly important to these students. This is illustrated by one target student who was successful in a class where the teacher was observed to move about the classroom constantly helping students, and unsuccessful in another class taught by the same teacher, but in which the teacher followed much more closely a "lecture-seatwork-no-teacher-assistance-unless-students-initiate-same" approach. These students' dependence on the teacher to clarify rules and norms was as evident as their need for academic help. For most of them, peer relations were successful. In fact, some dependent students established peer-tutoring relationships with other students that provided them the sort of feedback and reenforcement they needed.

Based on these findings, it appears that students who are rated as dependent students by their sixth-grade teachers warrant the most attention during the transition to junior high school. In line with their "label," their junior high performance seems to be particularly sensitive to the presence or absence of the four teacher behaviors mentioned earlier; at least much more so than the other students. The data for the larger seventh-grade sample included in the student concerns part of the study (see previous discussion) indicated that approximately 25 percent of the seventh-grade students at Waverley were

given dependent ratings in sixth grade. Thus it appears that the success of a sizeable portion of the student body might be improved, given that their teachers utilize those behaviors shown to be most effective in junior high classrooms.

Findings Regarding Changes in Student Participation

Given the above findings, it appears that the target students generally continued to function at the junior high school level much as they did in elementary school. However, some students participated markedly differently in some classes compared with others (based on seventh-grade teacher ratings). The participation ratings each target student received in the classes in which (s)he was observed are reported in Table 5.

For example, one of the students rated as an alienate in sixth grade performed better than the others in seventh grade. This student was rated as a phantom by his seventh-grade teachers. The others continued to receive alienate ratings along with showing some phantom or dependent characteristics.

Some of the phantom students received higher success ratings in some classes than in others. In these classes, the teachers rated them as exhibiting success/multitask characteristics as well as the phantom characteristics. One student rated as a phantom in grade 6 received success ratings for all the transition criteria in all his classes. His seventh-grade teachers rated him as a success/multitask student only.

The students rated as social in grade 6 showed a wide variety of participation characteristics across their seventh-grade classes. They received higher success ratings on the transition criteria in classes where the seventh-grade teacher rated them as showing success/multitask characteristics only, or a combination of these characteristics and their social interactions.

Interestingly, three of the students rated success/multitask in grade 6 were rated as social students in several of their seventh-grade classes and phantoms in others. These ways of participating did not appear to interfere with their obtaining "A" or "B" grades for the fall quarter, however. One student who was rated success/multitask in sixth-grade, had difficulty with the transition. He established good relations with his peers, but had difficulty remaining on-task. In fact, one teacher rated him as an alienate.

Students rated as dependents in sixth grade also received a wide variety of ratings by their seventh-grade teachers. Of concern, given that these students need to interact with the teacher or others if they are to learn, is the frequency with which the seventh-grade teachers rated them as phantom participants. This being the case, the responsibility for generating the types of interaction these students need falls almost entirely on the teacher.

Table 5

Target Student Participation Categories
as Rated by Sixth- and Seventh-Grade Teachers

TARGET STUDENT	CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION RATING											
	Sixth Grade	Seventh-Grade Classes in Which Observed										
		AA	AB	AC	AD	AE	AF	AG	AH	AI	AJ	AK
A5 Male	Alienate	Phantom/ Alienate			Phantom/ Alienate				Social/ Alien- ate/ Phantom			Depen- dent/ Phantom
A6 Male	Alienate		Phantom*		Phantom							Phantom
A7 Male	Alienate					Alienate		Alienate				
A8 Male	Alienate					Phantom/ Alienate	Depen- dent/ Phantom		Phantom/ Alienate		Alienate	
A9 Male	Phantom	Phantom/ Isolate	Phantom*			Phantom						
A10 Male	Phantom						Success				Success	
A11 Female	Phantom		Success/ Phantom*			Success/ Phantom					Success/ Phantom	
A12 Female	Phantom									Success/ Phantom*	Success/ Phantom/ Phantom/ Isolate**	
A13 Female	Depen- dent	Success/ Social			Depen- dent/ Phantom						Phantom	
A14 Female	Depen- dent	Phantom/ Alienate	Phantom*		Phantom/ Alien- ate*							
A15 Male	Depen- dent/ Social	Depen- dent	Phantom/ Isolate*		Phantom/ Isolate							
A16 Male	Depen- dent		Alien- ate/De- pendent/ Phantom*			Social					Alienate	
A17 Female	Depen- dent		Success/ Phantom*							Social/ Depen- dent*	Phantom	
A18 Female	Depen- dent		No Rating		Phantom/ Isolate						Phantom	

* This rating was given by the observer. No teacher rating was available for this class.

** This teacher taught two subjects. The target student was observed in both classes.

Table 5 (continued)

TARGET STUDENT	CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION RATING											
	Sixth Grade	Seventh-Grade Classes in Which Observed										
		AA	AB	AC	AD	AE	AF	AG	AH	AI	AJ	AK
A19 Male	Depen-dent	Depen-dent/ Phantom									Depen-dent/ Phantom	
A20 Female	Depen-dent		Success/ Phantom*		Success*							
A21 Female	Social	Social				Depen-dent/ Phantom		No Rating				
A22 Female	Social		Success/ Phantom*			Success/ Phantom		Success/ Social/ Phantom				
A23 Male	Social	Social			Alienate						Success/ Social	
A24 Male	Social			Success	Phantom*			Phantom				
A25 Male	Success			Alienate	Social/ Phantom*			Success				
A26 Male	Success	Social				Social*						Social
A27 Female	Success	Social		Social							Success	
A28 Female	Success	Success/ Phantom	Success/ Phantom*		Phantom*							

*This rating was given by the observer. No teacher rating was available for this class.

Success of Students in General

By combining all the target students' success ratings in all the classes in which they were observed, it is possible to obtain an estimate of the success of the students, in general.

In terms of overall success, the target students were rated as successful in 57 percent of their classes, moderately successful in 14 percent, and unsuccessful in 28 percent. Their academic behavior was rated successful in 54 percent of their classes, moderately successful in 15 percent, and unsuccessful in 30 percent. The students adapted to the rules and norms successfully in 61 percent of the classes, were moderately successful in 8 percent, and unsuccessful in 30 percent. Peer relations were successful in 72 percent of the classes, moderately successful in 11 percent, and unsuccessful in 15 percent. The students received "A" or "B" grades in 38 percent of the classes in which they were observed, "C" grades in 47 percent, and "D" or "F" grades in 14 percent.

Based on these data, it appears that the students were successful or moderately successful in more than half their classes and had problems in about 30 percent of them.

Implications for Improving Junior High/Middle Schools

The data summarized here suggest that attention to the teacher behaviors discussed earlier is essential, since they appear to be related to success in transition to junior high/middle school for a variety of students. Likewise, increased attention by junior high/middle school teachers to the needs of students who are judged by their sixth-grade teachers to be dependent learners is warranted. Exra time spent with these students seems to have a greater impact on their success than teacher time spent with alienated students. Most other students seem to do all right, regardless of the instructional setting.

From another viewpoint, the high rate of success in peer relationships that was evidenced suggests that the students' lack of concern about this aspect of the transition most likely was a valid assessment of the situation. The academic rather than the social aspects of the junior high/middle school program at Waverley seemingly need attention first.

STUDENTS' CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS AND CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

Initially, the intent of the Junior High School Transition Study was to obtain students' descriptions of their junior high school experiences from a variety of perspectives, i.e., academic, social, and

instructional. However, the student interviews conducted in October of the seventh-grade year indicated that, for the students whom we were studying, a request that they describe this experience lead to descriptions of their teachers, how the teachers interacted with students, the sorts of work they assigned, and so forth.

Hence the information summarized here focuses upon the 24 target students' conceptions of teachers. It builds from the common expressions students used in open-ended interviews to describe their daily experience within these teachers' classes. In presenting the data, we assume that the words seventh-graders use to describe their teachers reflect categories of meaning that are shared among the members of the seventh-grade student body. As such, the categories may provide indicators of the teacher characteristics and behaviors that constitute effective instruction from the students' perspective at the junior high/middle school level.

To understand students' conceptions of teachers, we began by examining the narrative records of the portions of the October interviews in which the target students described their teachers. From these spontaneous characterizations of teachers, we selected, for further exploration, eight adjectives used frequently by students. These adjectives were: (1) mean, (2) hard, (3) easy, (4) good, (5) strict, (6) boring, (7) fun, and (8) nice. During the May interview, we then asked students to describe what a "mean" (or hard or strict, etc.) teacher was like. This afforded us an opportunity to obtain more precise descriptions of the common characterizations.

Teacher Descriptions

Analysis of the interviews suggested that when students conceptualize their teachers, they attend to four major foci: (1) the academic work students are expected to complete, (2) the instructional facility of the teacher, (3) the nature of the daily classroom experience, and (4) the personal characteristics of the teacher.

Students' conceptions of teachers can be subdivided further into themes that allow more discrete characterizations of the classroom experience. Moreover, these themes are used by students to evaluate and suggest implicit contrasts among different types of teachers. These are reported in Table 6.

When discussing the academic work focus, students mentioned three themes: (a) the quantity of the work, (b) the difficulty of the work, and (c) the grading standards that the teacher used to evaluate the work. They spoke of teachers as assigning more and less work of varying levels of difficulty, and applying both demanding and lenient standards in the evaluation of this work.

When they considered the instructional facility of their teachers, students spoke of: (a) the quality of explanations provided by

Table 6

Summary of Foci, Themes, and Contrast Poles

FOCI	THEME	CONTRAST POLES
1. ACADEMIC WORK	(1) Quantity of Work	Less Work / More Work
	(2) Difficulty of Work	Easy Work / Hard Work
	(3) Grading Standards	Lenient / Demanding
2. INSTRUCTIONAL FACILITY	(1) Quality of Explanations	Inadequate / Clear
	(2) Individual Assistance	Not Available / Available
3. CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE	(1) Disciplinary Strategy	Punishment / Warning
	(2) Tolerance for Inappropriate Behavior	Low / High
	(3) Student Self-Management	Discouraged / Encouraged
	(4) Affective Character	Disagreeable / Engaging
4. PERSONAL CHARACTER-ISTICS	(1) Temperament	Unappealing / Appealing
	(2) Temper	Yells / Doesn't Yell
	(3) Relationship with Students	Uncaring / Interested

the teacher, and (b) the individual assistance the teacher was willing to provide. Students evaluated teacher's explanations as being clear or inadequate and discussed whether or not individual assistance was available to students.

When students described their classroom experience in general, they mentioned: (a) the disciplinary strategy employed by the teacher, (b) the teacher's tolerance for inappropriate behavior, (c) the degree to which the teacher encouraged students to manage their own classroom activities, and (d) the overall affective character of the class. Contrasts were made between teachers who warned students before punishing them and those with a "shorter fuse"; the different degrees of inappropriate behavior tolerated by one teacher compared with another; teachers who encouraged student self-management of work activities and those who did not; and classes that were considered disagreeable or engaging.

Students' also talked about the personal characteristics of teachers and mentioned specifically: (a) the temperament of different teachers, (b) the displays of temper observed, and (c) the relationships established with students. Contrasts were made between those teachers who had appealing temperaments and those who didn't; teachers who did or did not yell at their students, and teachers who appeared to be uncaring as contrasted with those who were interested in their students.

Profiles of Teacher Types

Using the above conceptual framework, we returned to the descriptive, teacher-modifying adjectives with which this analysis began and examined the characteristics attributed by three or more students to different types of teachers. To reiterate, our concern was with the types of teachers students described, not the specific individuals they encountered each day. We discuss these types below.

Mean Teachers. Seventh-graders perceived that mean teachers made it difficult for students to work successfully by failing to provide the individual help students' needed to complete their assigned work. The disciplinary strategy of mean teachers was one that emphasized immediate punishment rather than initially providing warnings to students that their behavior was unacceptable. Congruent with this disciplinary approach was the fact that mean teachers exhibited a low tolerance for inappropriate behavior and discouraged students from taking an active role in managing their classroom activities -- perhaps in order to prevent inappropriate behavior from erupting. Students considered mean teachers to have unappealing temperaments, and spoke of their frequent fits of temper during which they yelled at the class. These teachers also were perceived as uncaring and uninterested in their students.

Hard Teachers. Hard teachers were mainly characterized by the hard work they assigned and the demanding grading standards they applied in the evaluation of this work. The students' other foci --

instructional facility, classroom experience and personal characteristics -- were not particularly pertinent for describing a hard teacher. Further, hard teachers were not necessarily perceived negatively. Some students often indicated they liked them and learned a lot in their classes.

Easy Teachers. In contrast to hard teachers, easy teachers assigned lesser quantities of work. These assignments were also perceived as less difficult to complete. Whether the work actually was easier, or the teacher's other characteristics made it appear so, was impossible to determine within the framework of the analysis reported here. Students also noted that these teachers were interested in them.

Good Teachers. Students described good teachers as being able to communicate clearly and help students to fully understand the assigned material, thus the clarity of their classroom explanations distinguished them from all other teacher types. In addition, good teachers were considered to maintain enjoyable and engaging classes, possess appealing temperaments, and demonstrate interest in their students.

Strict Teachers. Strict teachers were percieved by students to be similar to mean teachers in that they assigned a great deal of work and were not available to provide individual assistance. They apparently expected their students to complete all work entirely on their own. Like mean teachers, their classroom disciplinary strategy utilized punishment, and they exhibited a low tolerance for misbehavior. Student self-management also was discouraged, and they were described as having unappealing temperaments. Unlike mean teachers, however, strict teachers were not necessarily perceived to give difficult assigments. In addition, they did not yell at their classes. No mention was made of the nature of the relationships they established with their students. It should be noted that students did not always consider strictness to be a negative quality in a teacher, but they did descibe a teacher negatively when this strictness was not balanced with other qualities.

Boring Teachers. Boring teachers were characterized by the disagreeable nature of their classes. Few comments pertaining to the other themes were made about boring teachers. It appears that when a teacher is boring, nearly all other characteristics of this individual, as well as the curriculum, elude discernment.

Fun Teachers. Fun teachers, like easy teachers, were perceived as assigning less work than most of the other teacher types. They provided students with individual help, and, in so doing, may have demonstrated the qualities that led to their students' perceptions of them as fun and the work as easier than in other types of teachers' classes. They encouraged students to manage their classroom activities. Fun teachers also exhibited appealing temperaments, did not yell at their classes, and, like good and nice teachers, they were interested in their students. Students' classroom experiences with these teachers were considered to be engaging.

Nice Teachers. Nice teachers were described as assigning less work than hard or strict teachers, and provided individual help to students who needed it. In terms of disciplinary strategy, they used either warnings or immediate punishments, depending on what they felt to be an appropriate response to misbehavior. Compared with the other teacher types, nice teachers were considered to display more tolerance for misbehavior. They maintained a classroom environment and used learning activities perceived as engaging, and they were described as being appealing individuals who did not yell in the classroom and who were interested in their students.

Implications for Improving Instruction

It must be noted that this analysis of teacher types simplifies the complex realities of the classroom and teachers' actions in the classroom. The researchers -- and the students we interviewed -- recognize that few teachers are completely mean all of the time, or, unalterably nice. Even nice teachers, the seventh-graders told us, resort to punishing students when necessary. If there is a lesson to be learned from this analysis, it is that students focus on different aspects of their classroom experience to categorize teachers. Good teachers, for example, are known among seventh-graders for their teaching skills, their enjoyable classes, their appealing personalities and the interest they take in their students' success. These characteristics reflect students' perceptions of an ideal teacher. They do not prove that one teacher type is always superior to others in producing achievement gains, improving student motivation and attitudes, or facilitating any other worthwhile educational outcome. They only describe what students consider to be important in their teachers. Should teachers be concerned about their students' perceptions and inevitable evaluations, then this research provides useful information for self-reflection and consideration of the ways in which one's classroom behaviors are perceived by students.

Moving beyond consideration of the teacher types to examination of the four aspects of the teacher and classroom on which the students' descriptions focused -- academic work, instructional facility, classroom experience, and personal characteristics -- there appears to be an interesting link between the characteristics that defined the students' concepts of teachers and the seventh-grade teacher behaviors that were related to students' successful transition to junior high school (see earlier discussion).

For example, with regard to students' successful transitions, teacher accessibility was identified as the most important within-activity-structure teacher behavior. For students, fun and nice teachers were available to provide individual assistance; mean and strict ones were not. Further, the extent to which the teacher established and individually enforced maintenance of a classroom environment in which students could function productively was shown to be important, based on the classroom observations. The students also focused on this feature of the classroom when describing teachers.

The observations further suggested that while attention to students' interests was less important than the above two teacher behaviors, it nonetheless was related to the amount of time students attended to assigned academic tasks. For the students, the teacher's interest in them (rather than attention to their interests) was an important descriptor. Although the difference in these two interpretations of "interest" may be subtle, it also suggests than this aspect of junior high/middle school instruction warrants further study. Finally, clarity of instruction and explanations was identified as an important variable in both data sets.

Thus it appears that seventh-grade students are aware of the instructional features that have been shown to constitute effective instruction and to relate to students' success in transition to junior high school. We feel it is of some significance that students focused on many of these same characteristics when they distinguished between different types of teachers. In particular, the match between observed and perceived teacher effectiveness that is suggested by the data reported here, for us, indicates even more strongly the importance of teachers' skill in the use of the four instructional features discussed earlier.

PARENTS' CONCERNS

As noted earlier, parents of the target students were interviewed in August, before seventh grade began, and again in November of the seventh-grade year. The goal was to learn what concerns parents held about their children's new schooling experience and what, if any, problems they foresaw for their offspring.

In the August interview, 34 parents were asked about any concerns they had regarding their child's transition into junior high school. They also were asked about concerns their child had expressed with respect to the coming transition. Following the reporting of concerns, the interview turned to a discussion of the nature of a successful transition. Parents were asked what things should be considered in determining whether or not a student had adjusted successfully to junior high school.

In the November interview, essentially the same questions were posed. Parents again were asked to discuss their concerns (and their children's) and their views of a successful transition. Parents now were able to provide information based on actual experiences during the first months of school, whereas in the first interview they could report only on their expectations regarding the transition experience.

In both interviews, parents were encouraged to talk freely in response to the open-ended questions that were raised. When necessary, probes were made in an attempt to draw out concerns or views that they might be hesitant to express.

Concerns That Were Reported

Parents' concerns regarding the transition experiences of their children were categorized according to a list of 33 concerns that had already been generated as the basis for the Concerns Questionnaire, which was administered by the district to all seventh-graders (see earlier discussion). In August, 20 of the 33 concerns were mentioned; in November, 22 were mentioned. However, both times few concerns were mentioned by each parent -- a mean of 2.8 per parent in August, and 2.7 in November.

Five concerns were expressed by 20 percent or more of the parents in August. These were:

Peer pressure to do things not right (41%);
Fear of bullying (29%);
Student's ability to get work done on time (29%);
Teachers not taking an interest (29%); and
Student being expected to act like a high-schooler (26%).

Only three specific concerns were mentioned by 20 percent or more of the parents in November:

Fear of bullying (32%);
Difficulty student was having in talking to teachers (26%); and
Student's ability to get work done in time (23%).

The nature of the concerns expressed by parents of boys and of girls was similar. One difference worth noting dealt with "peer pressure to do things not right." In August, 8 of 13 parents of girls (62%) mentioned peer pressure as a concern, while only 6 of 21 parents of boys (29%) did so. In November, this concern was mentioned by 16 percent of the parents of boys and 17 percent of the parents of girls. Thus the level of concern for this matter appears to have dropped as the year progressed for both girls' and boys' parents, but particularly for girls.

Criteria for a Successful Transition

In both the August and November interviews, parents were asked what things should be considered in determining whether or not a student had adjusted successfully to junior high school. Based on their responses, nine criteria were identified:

- Academic success -- includes such indicators as "good grades," "knowledge of subject matter," "grades as good as in elementary school," and "grades that satisfy the student."

- Affective success -- refers to the emotional well-being of the student, e.g., "happy," "not moody or irritable," "not anxious."

- Successful peer relationships -- includes indicators like "gets along with peers," "accepted by peers," "has a broad circle of friends," and "understands peers from different backgrounds."

- Successful management of time -- includes "gets work done on time," "has good study habits," and "takes responsibility for assignments."

- Positive attitude toward school -- includes such indicators as "enjoys school" and "likes his or her teachers."

- Involvement in extracurricular activities -- includes indicators like "gets involved in school activities" and "plays sports."

- Successful authority relationships -- focuses on the students' relationships with adults, especially teachers, e.g., "gets along with teachers," "stays out of trouble."

- Motivation -- includes indicators like "wants to go to school" and "interested in school work."

- Other -- includes those indicators that could not be classified into one of the eight categories above.

The three most frequently reported criteria in August were "academic success" (48%), "affective success" (48%), and "successful peer relations" (39%). "Successful management of time" also was reported by 27 percent of the parents. The remaining criteria were each mentioned by less than 25 percent of the parents.

In November, the same three criteria were mentioned most frequently: "academic success" (44%), "affective success" (41%), and "successful peer relations" (41%). "Successful authority relationships" was the only other criterion mentioned by more than 25 percent of the parents at this time.

In addition to being asked about criteria for a successful transition, in November parents were asked if their child had adjusted successfully to junior high school. Of the 29 parents who responded to this question, 26 said "yes," 2 "no," and 1 "partially."

Implications

The parent interview data suggest that, on the whole, parents' felt their children had made successful transitions to junior high school. Based on the success criteria mentioned most frequently, these judgments appear to have been based on a combination of academic success, affective success, and successful peer relations. Successful authority relationships also may have been considered.

The aspects of junior high school about which parents expressed concern were few. They centered around bullying of their children by other students; difficulty in talking to teachers on the part of their children; and problems their children had with getting work done on time. It must be noted that less than one-third of the parents had these concerns (which were the ones mentioned most often), so, generally, parents could be described as unconcerned.

One question to ask relative to these findings, given the fact that data presented earlier indicated some target students' transitions were unsuccessful, is whether the parents were adequately informed about their children's performance during the transition process. The target student case descriptions indicate that teacher contacts with parents most often resulted in improved student performance. Yet few such contacts were recorded as occurring. A more frequent and more substantive exchange of information with parents may be warranted.

SUMMARY

The Junior High School Transition Study identified several features of elementary and junior high/middle schools that appear to facilitate students' successful transition to secondary level school.

Based on the study findings, the following aspects of the education program appear to warrant attention:

1. At the elementary level, developing students' skills in decoding, understanding, and responding to the demands of different activity structures seems to be more important than experience in moving from one teacher to another for various subjects.

2. At the junior high school level, the following aspects of the school program should be reviewed:

    a. The content of the curriculum requires attention. In particular, the overlap in the math content and the emphasis on fact-recall learning activities should be studied. In doing so, the dilemma posed by the work of Epstein and Toepfer and the work in the area of cognitive development needs to be kept in mind.

    b. The lack of diversity in the seventh-grade activity structures needs to be considered. To prepare students for successful performance in the work force or in college, continued experience in more complex and demanding activity structures is suggested.

    c. Various ways of grouping students for instruction should be explored.

d. Analysis of the extent to which junior high school teachers use the four instructional features that were related to students' success and conduct of school improvement programs that increase and perfect teachers' use of these features are suggested.

Other aspects of the elementary and secondary education programs that warrant exploration are:

1. The activities undertaken at the end of grade six and the beginning of grade seven to acquaint students with the junior high school program.

2. The needs of seventh-grade students who are identified by their sixth-grade teachers as dependent participants.

3. Exchange of information with parents of seventh-grade students.

Whatever improvements are undertaken, the academic aspects of the program seemingly need attention first, with concern for the social aspects to follow later.

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